

News/Feature

Bosnian refugees arrive in Fredericton

by Jonathan Stone

Fredericton is now home to 18 Bosnians who have fled their homeland.

The newcomers deplaned a flight from Toronto on a cold Sunday night after spending all day travelling from a detention camp in Karlovac.

This is the largest group of refugees ever to come to Fredericton at one time, and they will be assisted by the YMCA.

"People are coming in all the time, it just happens that they are a large group of people that came in at once," said Beth Vye, Coordinator of Settlement Programs for the local YMCA.

Darrell Mesheau, Director of Immigration for the New Brunswick Region, said, "We receive in New Brunswick about 150 refugees a year from different parts of the world."

The Department of Employment and Immigration gives funding to the YMCA to manage the settlement programs.

"We contract with the Y to co-ordinate the host program, we pay them to co-ordinate the recruitment of volunteers; they also carry out the Immigration Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP)," said Mesheau.

Students can also be helpful in the settling process; Mesheau emphasized the need for volunteers.

"What they (the newcomers) really need are friends, more than official help, because the Y and our own offices are somewhat limited as to what they can do," he said.

UNB students can help the YMCA by becoming 'host volunteers'. Vye explained the process:

"They (volunteers) go through two training programs, about two hours each."

In these sessions, volunteers are introduced to the program and the responsibilities to be met. As well, the immigration classification system is explained.

Because of this ongoing program, Vye was able to match the Bosnians with host families before they arrived.

She said she currently has 47 volunteers, including some university people and many professionals.

"We could always use volunteers," she said, and described

what has been encountered in the past:

"They (the newcomers) have a really hard time trying to substitute things that they are used to in their diet that they can afford. The volunteers help them try to supplement different foods, or find them a store that sells ethnic food."

But unexpected things have happened.

"Some people have even gone into the delivery room, because

they become friends, and they (the newcomers) really rely on them, even if they don't speak the language, they're still friends. That's happened a couple of times."

Volunteers can also help in language studies.

The YMCA provides two LINC classes, (Language Instruction for New Canadians), which have volunteer tutors.

The Bosnian group has little English training.

UNB student speaks with newcomers

by Jonathan Stone

A UNB student might have a 'big say' in the social integration of 18 Bosnian refugees who have made Fredericton their new home.

Gregor Golja, working for a Master's Degree in Mechanical Engineering, speaks Croatian, a language spoken by the Bosnians.

He is one of three people known to speak the language in this city.

"I know it's quite hard to find anybody to speak Croatian here," he said, "None of them (the Bosnians) can speak a single word of English."

Golja read about their arrival in a recent issue of *The Daily Gleaner*, so he contacted the YMCA to offer his help.

Beth Vye, Coordinator of Settlement Programs for the local YMCA, expressed her surprise when she heard from him.

"He's really helping out with the ISAP (Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program) part of it already," she said, "It turns out that we have three people in Fredericton who can speak this language, and when they (the Bosnians) came, I only had one."

As part of the YMCA's settlement program, the Bosnians will be participating in an ongoing English training course.

Vye said Golja was enthusiastic about meeting people from his own part of the world.

"He was as excited as they were, when I took him to introduce him."

Golja learned Croatian in his home country Slovenia, which neighbours Bosnia.

"Back home I had to study it; I read a few books in Croatian, and I also had a course in Croatian," he said, "There are many programs on TV in the Croatian language."

He described the Bosnians' sentiments about their new country.

"When I was speaking with them, they were surprised at how they were accepted in Toronto, and how they got clothing and food. They were very, very happy about coming here," he said.

According to Golja, this group picked Canada from 22 other countries.

"I also asked them, 'Why Canada, why did you pick Canada?' and one of them said, 'I just wanted to start a new life, a totally new life far, far away from those troubles.'"

He added that for the Bosnians, the cold climate was not a deterrent, that some of the men joked about it.

"One of them said 'yes it's cold, but when I was in the army...' and the other guys started teasing him, 'Which army? Which army? The Serbian army?'" he said.

Golja said that the newcomers have not yet had much opportunity to walk around Fredericton, because they worry about their children getting cold.

He said he plans to help the newcomers as much as he can.

"Right now, sometimes I have a lot of time, and sometimes I don't, it depends on my assignments."

Golja expects to be here until the end of June, and to return for school next year.



A Bosnian Family steps out into a new country at the Fredericton Airport. They are part of a group of 18 refugees to arrive in the city as part of a relief effort assisted by Employment and Immigration. All they have to battle now is the cold.

Photo courtesy of Employment and Immigration

Canada plays vital role in assisting refugees

by Jonathan Stone

The five new Bosnian families in Fredericton are only a small portion of a larger group in Canada.

These 18 refugees are part of the 500 that Canada has agreed to allow into the country.

The Bosnians are the largest group of refugees ever to arrive in Fredericton.

When asked about any negative feedback from the community, Darrell Mesheau, the province's Director of Immigration, said, "No, we've had none. It's been all positive."

Because the situation in Yugoslavia is so bad, the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross had to negotiate the release of 5000 citizens detained in war-zone detention centres, and appealed for international help in the relief effort.

Canada responded by permanently accepting the Bosnians as convention refugees, while others, like Switzerland, are only providing temporary facilities.

A convention refugee, as defined by the Geneva Convention, is a person who by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution, for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or a political opinion is outside their country of citizenship and are unable to avail themselves of the protection of that country, or they no longer have a country to return to.

Other countries helping Bosnian refugees are the US, New Zealand, Great Britain and

France.

Canada has a history of assisting countries faced with national crises.

Similar programs are already operating for refugees from Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Iran, El Salvador and Guatemala.

Also, special measures were adopted during Poland's martial law period, and similar steps were taken for Chinese students after the June 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

These measures have been placed for natural disasters like the Italian earthquake of 1979.

To ease the entry of newcomers into society, Employment and Immigration Canada employs a program which funds non-profit organizations for the settlement of immigrants.

Mesheau explained: "Any organization which has the wherewithal to provide the service can apply to be contracted for the year."

In Fredericton, this happens to be the responsibility of the YMCA.

Here, immigrants can learn the differences in Canadian society and learn to speak English.

"There is a continuous intake class going on, for other arrivals from other countries. It even provides daycare for the children," said Mesheau.

In fact, the Fredericton YMCA has made a video about the host program, which is now being used across the country to help recruit hosts and volunteers in other cities.



'The Benefits of Bilingualism': Mechanical Engineering student Gregor Golja is one of three known people who can speak Croatian in the Fredericton area. He learned it as a second language in his home country, Slovenia. He will be useful in the integration of the Bosnian newcomers into Canadian society.

Photo by Kevin G. Porter